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Weekly Special Report



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INSIDE

First Lady Announces Pediatric HIV/AIDS Initiative

By Charles W. Corey
Washington File
Staff Writer

Washington -- A new public-private partnership for pediatric AIDS treatment, part of President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), was announced March 13 by first lady

Laura Bush at a White House gathering she hosted for a group of South African mothers.



Mrs. Laura Bush visits with representatives from the Mothers to Mothers-To-Be program of South Africa, March 13, 2006 at the White House. White House photo by Kimberlee Hewitt

The first lady told the mothers, who are engaged in the fight against HIV/AIDS, that the

United States, multilateral organizations and pharmaceutical companies have agreed to contribute more and greater resources to the cause of fighting pediatric HIV/AIDS.

"Members of this alliance will identify scientific obstacles to treat-

(Continued on page 3)

Scholarship Gives Education and Hope

Segenet Wendawork was five years old when her mother died. Her father soon remarried and moved away with his new wife. Segenet remained with her grandmother until she was nine, when her grandmother passed away. She then went to live with her aunt, who kept her home from school to help with chores. When the family became abusive and her uncle began sexually



Segenet envisions a future full of promise after graduating as an Ambassador's Girls' Scholarship student.

harassing her, Segenet left and moved in with a friend.

Unable to keep up with her studies, she failed eighth grade. When Segenet's father heard about her situation, he took her to live with him and his wife. Although she was able to attend school, this family

(Continued on page 2)

U.S. Programs in Ethiopia

Embassy-funded Project Reduces FGM in Eastern Showa Zone (P 2)

U.S. Embassy staff observe Women's History Month (P 4)

"Paper Show" to Commemorate Historically Black Colleges and Universities (P 4)

PAS Donates Books and Held Presentation and Training to Bahir Dar University (P 5)

African issues

U.S. Embassy Outreach Helps Africans Tackle Social Challenges (P 6)

Crisis of Abducted Ugandan Children Shown in Documentary (P 7)

U.S. Praises African Union's Support for U.N. Operation in Darfur (P 8)

Fight against Terrorism

Additional \$91 Billion Sought To Fight Terror in Iraq, Afghanistan (P 9)

Justice Department Consolidates Counterterrorism Effort (P 11)

Women's Issues/Democracy

State's Hughes Says Women's Empowerment Critical to U.S. Agenda (P 13)

Flag Desecration Debate in U.S. "Alive and Well," Scholar Says (P14)

Technology Promotes Democracy, Lawmakers Say (P 15)

HIV/AIDS & Bird Flu

U.S. Builds New Public Partnership for Pediatric AIDS Treatment (P 17)

Bird Flu Detected in 11 Nigerian States (P 19)

U.N. Predicts Bird Flu in the Americas Within a Year (P 20)

Embassy-funded Project Reduces FGM in Eastern Showa Zone

The Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) is one of two funding mechanisms administered by Chargé d'Affaires Vicki Huddleston's Small Projects Office to support Ethiopians' efforts to improve their lives. The DHRF makes grants to local organizations for short-term, high-impact activities that promote political pluralism and human and civil rights. Women's empowerment, human rights education and conflict resolution are among the activities assisted by the fund.

The DHRF recently supported a project to reduce Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) in the Dugda Bora District of East Showa Zone in Oromia. HTPs in this area include female genital mutilation (FGM), abduction and early marriage. A series of workshops were conducted in order to engage religious leaders, elders,

and other influential community members in reducing HTPs. In addition, village awareness campaigns and school awareness campaigns were conducted to educate and mobilize traditional village associations, students, parents, and

more girls are finding the courage to resist circumcision, and more boys are committed to marrying uncircumcised girls.

Another aspect of this project included finding new livelihoods for the women who used to perform FGM for a living. Oxen and cows were donated to them so they could begin a new livelihood and avoid falling into poverty as more community members opt to stop practicing FGM. In all, fourteen women in the district agreed to abandon the practice.



Women leaders from Dugda Bora meet to discuss ways to reduce Harmful Traditional Practices in their communities.

teachers. T-shirts and caps with anti-HTP messages were distributed throughout the community. As a result, the number of parents who promised not to circumcise their daughters has increased,

write the Small Projects Office at: U.S. Embassy, P.O. Box 1014, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, or call: 251-011-517-4779/4850. ♦

Scholarship Gives Education and Hope . . .

(Continued from page 1)

also became abusive, and Segenet's teachers began noticing the bruises on her face.

"I had just made the decision to quit school and move away when I noticed a scholarship program advertisement. This was a ray of hope for me," said Segenet. When she was told that her father's income made her ineligible, she approached several teachers who intervened on her behalf and was

awarded the USAID-funded Ambassador's Girls' scholarship.

"I am 20 and graduating this year," Segenet says happily. She lives with another scholarship recipient and hopes to attend university and major in tourism management. "Before the scholarship, I was unable to dream about the future," said Segenet. "How could I envision a good future when all my energy was dedicated to simply surviving the problems surrounding me?"

USAID's scholarship program has been helping girls like Segenet complete their education since 2000. The program enables girls with a strong academic record but few economic resources to finish school. Scholarship recipients receive tuition payments, a housing allowance, educational materials, and tutorial services.

"I am very thankful to the scholarship for helping to provide me with a bright future," Segenet said. ♦

First Lady Announces Pediatric HIV/AIDS Initiative . . .

(Continued from page 1)

ment for children," she said.

"They'll take practical steps to give parents and lay people simpler and safer anti-retroviral medicines to use for children. They will share best practices in science and medicine and they'll develop systems to speed up the review, the approval, the manufacturing and the availability of pediatric anti-retroviral drugs."

The visit by the mothers' group to the White House was a follow-up to the first lady's visit to HIV and AIDS centers in South Africa in 2005.

A transcript (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060313-2.html>) of Laura Bush's remarks is available on the White House Web site.

COOPERATION NEEDED TO MEET CHALLENGE OF AIDS, TOBIAS SAYS

U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and USAID Administrator-designate Randall Tobias discussed the new partnership initiative later that day at a Georgetown University Forum that honored the Cape Town mothers.

Speaking of the new initiative, Tobias said, "It will take all of us working together to meet the range of daunting challenges that HIV and AIDS poses for families around the world."

Tobias reminded the audience, which included Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, that HIV/AIDS continues

to exact a "horrific toll on our world."

Saying that people never must lose sight of the death toll caused by HIV/AIDS, he noted the "growing number of positive developments around the world today" with respect to the virus.

He saluted the South African mothers' group for representing a "growing reality" of leadership against HIV/AIDS at the grassroots level, saying the leadership coming from women "is a development that our nation is indeed very proud to support."

Tobias praised the mothers' group as one of many PEPFAR partners with "deep roots" in their own communities, making them "uniquely qualified to meet the needs of their people."

There are many challenges involved in responding to global HIV/AIDS, he said, and cited pediatric treatment as among the toughest challenges. For that reason, he said, it is an "absolute necessity" to bring together leaders to work through the issues.

Tobias said preventing the tragedy of mother-to-child transmission of HIV is one of PEPFAR's highest priorities. "Mother-to-child transmission is now an exceedingly rare event here in the United States, and we are working toward the day when that can be said of South Africa and other developing nations," he told his audience.

In the first two years of the President's Emergency Plan, he said, the United States has supported

its partners in South Africa and other countries in reaching more than 3.2 million pregnant women with services to prevent mother-to-child transmission. "We estimate that these interventions have prevented at least 47,000 infant infections to date," he said.

Until pediatric AIDS transmission is eliminated worldwide, he said, it is crucial to make anti-retroviral treatment available to every child infected.

The United States, according to Tobias, estimates that at least 7 percent of those who received treatment at PEPFAR-supported sites in the past year were children.

"I think that makes clear that there are many, many more children that we need to reach. There are so many challenges involved in responding to global HIV/AIDS," he said.

Tobias said his message to the mothers is that "the American people are proud to be your partners and we will continue to stand by you in the days ahead."

The PEPFAR program is a five-year, \$15 billion global initiative to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

For additional information, see President Bush's HIV/AIDS Initiatives (http://usinfo.state.gov/global_issues/HIV_AIDS/hiv_aids_initiative.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

U.S. Embassy Staff Observe Women's History Month

U.S. Embassy Staff in Addis Ababa observed International Women's Day and Women's History Month (marked in the United States) at a symposium organized at the U.S. Ambassador's residence on March 14, 2006.

Five women panelists gave presentations

on Women's Rights and Religion, Women in the Economy, Women in Decision Making, Women's Legal Rights and Violence Against Women.

The symposium was organized to increase the awareness of mission

employees on issues that are of critical concern to women and which impact the lives of women in Ethiopia and the world.

Over 70 mission staff and some invited guests attended the symposium. ♦



The five panelists (L to R) W/t. Konjit Worku, Ethiopian Civil Service College, Wzo. Bogalech Alemu, Pathfinder International, W/t. Helen Seifu, Interfaith Peace-Building Initiative, Wzo. Mahdere Paulos, Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, and Wzo. Nigest Haile, Center for African Women Economic Empowerment.

"Paper Show" to Commemorate Historically Black Colleges and Universities



Students at the John F. Kennedy Library at Addis Ababa University check out a "paper show" sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in commemoration of African American History Month. The paper show, entitled "Historically Black," chronicles the growth of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States, from the mid-1800s through today. These schools opened the door to African Americans when other doors were shamefully barred. The show will be displayed at several educational institutions around Ethiopia. ♦

Journalism and English Teaching Books Donated to Bahir Dar University

On March 7, 2006, the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Section donated a collection of books to Bahir Dar University. The donation included 45 textbooks for English teaching and print and broadcast journalism. Ato Getachew Abebe, Acting Dean of the Faculty of Edu-

cation of the University and members of the English and Journalism Departments thanked the Embassy for this significant addition to their Library's collection. U.S. Embassy Information Resource Center Director, Wzo. Yerusalem Ashenafi and visiting Nairobi-based Information

Resource Officer Karen Hartman personally presented the books to the University. The donated volumes are a welcome addition to the reference library of the newly established Faculty of Journalism at Bahir Dar University. ♦



(L) Some of the donated books; (R) IRO Karen Hartman with Ato Getachew Abebe, Acting Dean of the Faculty of Education and Head of the new Journalism Department at Bahir Dar University.

Presentation and Training Held at the American Corner in Bahir Dar

PAS Addis Ababa held one day training at the Bahir Dar American Corner on March 8, 2006 for about 20 academic librarians selected from various high schools including the Bahir Dar University. IRO Karen Hartman

made a presentation on academic librarianship and the IRC Director gave Internet Basic training for the librarians.



Yerusalem Ashenafi, IRC Director, giving the training

The librarians actively participated in the program and discussed the problems which prevent them from exercising the lessons learned from the training at their respective institutions as most of them work in a traditional library environment where access to computers/Internet is limited to academic and/or administrative staff. However, they confirmed that such kind of training was the first one that they attended and expressed their gratitude requesting PAS to extend its continuous support by arranging future trainings focusing on basic library functions as they have no access to such opportunities and recommended to include an educational session for their administrators as part of future trainings. ♦

U.S. Embassy Outreach Helps Africans Tackle Social Challenges

By Jim Flsher-Thompson
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- From helping pygmies in Gabon, to hosting basketball tournaments in Madagascar, to sponsoring HIV/AIDS discussions in mosques in Cote d'Ivoire, U.S. embassies are reaching out with renewed vigor to help Africans deal with pressing social challenges at the local level.

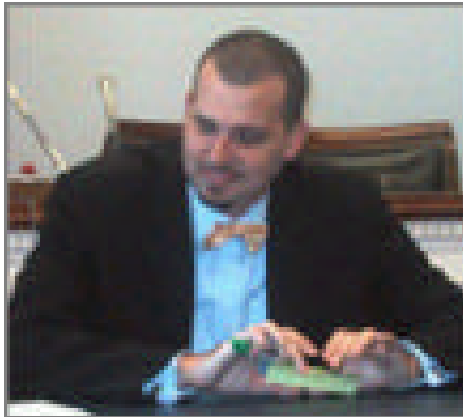
That energy was spurred, in part, by recently appointed Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer, who told a congressional hearing in 2005 that she would empower U.S. diplomats to go out into the countryside -- to implement development programs with grassroots African partners.

Frazer herself set the example for this proactive approach with a number of whirlwind trips to the continent after assuming office in 2005. She met openly with leaders of various factions in Sudan in an effort to kick-start stalled negotiations and celebrated with Liberians at the election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first female head of state.

The U.S. official's open approach was duplicated most recently by one of the newest members of her staff -- Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa Bobby Pittman -- during a recent trip to Zambia and South Africa.

According to a document provided by the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria, Pittman made a big hit in a roundtable discussion with three senior foreign affairs journalists in South Africa.

Pittman displayed a "keen interest in the South African economy," the U.S. Embassy said, adding he impressed journalists with his knowledge on topics ranging from the Zimbabwe crisis and U.S.



Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa Robert Pittman.

policy toward the country to restraints to U.S. investment in southern Africa and U.S. support for emerging mortgage markets in Zambia and South Africa.

OUTREACH EFFORTS IN GABON

Another proponent of the hands-on grassroots approach to development is U.S. Ambassador to Gabon R. Barrie Walkley, a former Peace Corps Volunteer in Somalia from 1967 to 1969, who later joined the Foreign Service.

In Gabon, Walkley oversees an innovative self-help program for pygmies living in the remote rain forest cluster of villages called Imbong. According to an embassy document, in 2005 the Ambassadors Special Self-help Fund "provided the Pygmies of Imbong the opportunity to improve their lives by increasing their agricultural production."

Recently, Walkley and his staff members traveled to the provincial capital of Makokou and then an additional 180 kilometers for four hours on a dirt road to Imbong to check on the project. There, the team finalized the delivery of machetes, axes and cooking pots to facilitate large-scale manioc cultivation and production.

According to the embassy, "the Pygmies have already put donated material to use and are now selling or exchanging excess production in neighboring villages."

BLACK HISTORY CELEBRATIONS IN MADAGASCAR

The challenges of youth and social development have not been neglected by U.S. diplomats in Africa. In Madagascar, the U.S. Embassy celebrated Black History month in America by sponsoring an "HIV/AIDS Awareness Basketball Tournament" among 35 high schools in the Antananarivo area.

The sports effort in Madagascar featured both boys' and girls' teams in a program put together by Ambassador James McGee and local Malagasy education officials.

At the finals on February 22, 5,000 students attended as well as teachers, five government ministers and the Mayor of Antananarivo. The Ministry of Defense provided the referees with the participation of 11 other Malagasy institutions, including the fire department, police, 25 peer educators, 100 local Scouts and cheerleading squads from high schools.

(Continued on page 10)

Crisis of Abducted Ugandan Children Shown in Documentary

By Susan Ellis
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Three young Americans hope that on the night of April 29, thousands of Americans will take part in a "global night commute," lying down in the streets of their hometowns for a humanitarian mission.

"Congress couldn't ignore that," says one of the producers of a documentary made to show the plight of thousands of children in Northern Uganda who leave their homes every night for a long hike to town to avoid being abducted by soldiers of the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

The children are called "night commuters," hiking through the heat and dust, clutching mats and blankets as they pour into the town of Gulu to sleep under the veranda of the hospital and in a bus park.

Their plight was shown March 8 in the documentary *Invisible Children* at the Hudson Institute, a policy research organization in Washington.

"We don't fear abduction during the day," says one young boy on the documentary. "But at night they come for us." If apprehended, the boys then are conscripted into the rebel army and terrorized into killing and raping.

The LRA, led by Joseph Kony, has been waging a 20-year war of terror against the Acholi people of Northern Uganda. Hundreds of the Acholi are dying every day. Children are abducted, women raped, schools closed while the population starves.

This tragedy has been captured on videotape by a trio of young

American men, Jason Russell, Laren Poole and Bobby Bailey. They have traveled to the region three times, beginning in the spring of 2003.

The young men wrote letters describing their proposed mission to raise funds and bought video equipment from eBay (an Internet auction site for buying goods cheaply).

Their goal now is to enlist the time,



"Night commuters" at Kitgum Hospital in Northern Uganda. Thousands of children abandon their villages at night seeking safety from armed groups who abduct children and force them to become child soldiers or sexual slaves.

talent and money of Americans to support the Acholi in their struggle.

The plight of the Acholi will receive the attention of the U.S. Congress March 9 at a hearing before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. U.S. government officials from the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and representatives from nongovernmental humanitarian organizations will testify on the crisis in Northern Uganda, the conditions in the international displaced persons camps and the abductions of children.

Two of the video's producers, Russell and Poole, appeared at the Washington screening to describe their campaign and enlist support. Some of their strategies, they

said, include selling bracelets in different colors, accompanied by a copy of the video, and organizing a number of fund-raising projects across America, such as car washes, dance marathons and sponsored bicycle rides. They hope to capture nationwide attention on television news programs via the Global Night Commute.

The filmmakers formed a non-profit organization called Invisible Children Inc. in 2004. The organization has started an education program in the Ugandan war area and a bracelet campaign that employs Ugandans and helps fund the education program.

They have launched a national tour to screen the documentary in more than 150 cities across the United States and have sent out seven teams in recreational vehicles to canvas the country with the film. Each screening includes a viewing of the film, a question-and-answer session and opportunities to become involved in helping the children of Uganda.

Reactions from audiences in high schools and colleges to the documentary reveal the deep emotion young Americans experience as they watch the humanitarian crisis unfold on the screen.

One part of the video shows Jacob, recently escaped from his conscripted post in the violent rebel army. As the camera watches, he breaks down in sobs, remembering his brother's murder. Jacob is 14 years old.

A university student in Wisconsin emerged from the screening and said: "It changed my life. You can't see it and keep living the same way." ♦

U.S. Praises African Union's Support for U.N. Operation in Darfur

The United States applauds the African Union's decision to support the transition of peacekeeping operations in the Darfur region of Sudan to a United Nations peacekeeping operation, the State Department announced in a March 10 statement.

Although the African Union Mission in Sudan has provided "initial stabilization and reduced large-scale organized violence", the United States is continuing to work with the U.S. Security Council for the authorization of a U.N. peacekeeping mission, the statement said. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Mar/02-490764.html>).)

"The United States will work with our international partners to strengthen and support the African Union peacekeeping mission in the interim period," according to the statement.

Recent discussions by Deputy Secretary Robert B. Zoellick in Europe with Sudan and African Union mediators cited "huge challenges" facing the world community while Darfur remains in crisis. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Mar/11-729776.html>).)

"President Bush has made resolving the Darfur crisis a top priority, and the United States has been working hard with all parties to promote peace, security and reconciliation," the State Department said.

Following is the text of the statement:

Tom Casey, Acting Spokesman
Washington, DC

March 10, 2006

Transition of African Union Mission in Sudan to United Nations Operation.

will simultaneously work closely with Sudan's Government of National Unity and our African and European partners to energize the African Union-mediated Darfur peace talks in Abuja, Nigeria.

There is no time to waste. People are suffering and dying in Darfur, while millions are at risk as the security situation deteriorates.

President Bush has made resolving the Darfur crisis a top priority, and the United States has been working hard with all parties to promote peace, security and reconciliation. The United States supports and is committed to assisting in the transition to a United Nations peacekeeping operation within the framework of partnership between the African Union and the United Nations as soon as possible. Discussions held by

Deputy Secretary Robert B. Zoellick this week in Europe with many of the parties and the African Union mediators highlighted the opportunity to make significant progress in the Abuja peace talks in the near future.

As the United States works to authorize and deploy a United Nations peacekeeping force in Darfur, we will work with our international partners to strengthen and support the African Union peacekeeping mission in the interim period.

(end text)

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦



AU Mission in Sudan

The United States is pleased that the African Union decided today (March 10) to support a transition to a United Nations peacekeeping operation in Darfur. The members of the African Union's Peace and Security Council have recognized the urgent need to improve security for the suffering people of Darfur, and we applaud their decision.

The African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) has been a success, providing initial stabilization and reducing large-scale organized violence. The United States will now work in the United Nations Security Council to push for authorization of a United Nations peacekeeping mission as soon as possible, with African troops at its core and under African leadership. We

Additional \$91 Billion Sought To Fight Terror in Iraq, Afghanistan

By David Anthony Denny
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington — A \$91 billion supplemental budget request would be used to advance U.S. security and economic goals in Iraq and Afghanistan, among other places, Condoleezza Rice says.

The secretary of state testified March 9 along with Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and generals Peter Pace and John Abizaid at the Senate Appropriations Committee. Pace is the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Abizaid is the commander of U.S. Central Command, which includes Afghanistan and Iraq.

The joint State-Defense testimony reinforced the administration's position that both diplomatic and military activities are necessary to win the war against terrorism and to develop stable democracies, Rice said.

The State Department's supplemental funding request is geared mainly toward Iraq, where Rice said newly formed government ministries need additional support to function effectively.

"It is no surprise that these are bureaucracies and ministries that have needed to be completely reformed as Iraq moves from a dictatorial society ... [and] have very little modern capacity to govern," Rice said.

Once the insurgency has been cleared out, she said, additional funds would be made available for

provincial reconstruction teams, provincial leadership support and governance and infrastructure development.

For Afghanistan, the supplemental budget request also would

for nongovernmental organizations that function within Iran, and "in many ways most importantly, to improve and increase our educational and cultural outreach to the people of Iran," Rice said.

In addition, the State Department requested funding to support post-quake reconstruction efforts in Pakistan, and money for humanitarian aid and peacekeeping efforts in the Darfur region of Sudan.

HELPING PARTNER NATIONS DEFEND THEMSELVES

Rumsfeld spoke about the need to help partner nations and allies develop their capabilities to better govern and defend themselves. This emphasis on partner capability building, he said, is at the heart of the efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as in several smaller-scale training and equipping operations in places like the Philippines and the Republic of Georgia.

"Our investments and policy should reflect these new requirements. ... When other nations and partners can shoulder greater security burdens within their borders and around the globe, it's far less likely that U.S. troops will be called on, at what is always considerably greater cost in both blood and treasure to our nation," Rumsfeld said.

Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia asked Rumsfeld whether his department had a plan if a civil war occurs in Iraq. The secretary said the plan was to prevent a civil war from happening and, if one



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Peter Pace, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice testify at a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing in Washington March 9. REUTERS/Jason Reed

cover debt forgiveness, refugee assistance and some energy infrastructure reconstruction, Rice said.

The State Department requested \$75 million to expand television and radio broadcasts, as well as online communications, to directly reach the Iranian people. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=February&x=20060215170735ndy-blehs2.477664e-02&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>).)

The request also includes support

(Continued on page 10)

Additional \$91 Billion Sought To Fight Terror in Iraq, Afghanistan . . .

(Continued from page 9)

were to occur, to have the Iraqi security forces respond to the extent that they are capable of doing so.

Pace described how the supplemental funding would be used to replace equipment that is being destroyed, damaged or worn out in Iraq and Afghanistan, to buy body armor and other needed protective equipment and to fund research on ways to defeat roadside bombs.

Abizaid said more money is needed to continue funding the further development and equipping of Iraq's military and police forces.

REACHING OUT TO SOUTH ASIA, AFRICA

In a second congressional hearing before a House Appropriations subcommittee March 9, Rice was asked about South Asia and Africa.

She said India is a natural partner for the United States and that the landmark civil nuclear agreement that recently was concluded with New Delhi will bring India into the nonproliferation mainstream. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-eng-lish&y=2006&m=March&x=20060302111240ndyblehs0.734997&t=sa/sa-latest.html>).)

In addition, Rice said she would consider a committee member's suggestion that a U.S. special envoy is needed in Sudan.

The U.S. Congress must approve all appropriations requests and can reduce or increase the amount of money requested before funds become available. Such legislation must be approved by both the House of Representatives and the Senate and be signed by the president in order to take effect.

The full text (<http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2006/sp20060309-12630.html>) of Rumsfeld's prepared testimony is available on the Defense Department Web site.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

U.S. Embassy Outreach Helps Africans Tackle Social Challenges . . .

(Continued from page 6)

According to the Malagasy media, this reaching out to youth through sports was a "staggering success" unexpected by even old Africa hands who worked in the U.S. mission.

BACKPACKS IN CHAD, VIDEOS IN COTE D'IVOIRE

Outreach to Muslims worldwide is of particular importance to the U.S. government whose "Shared Futures" program now provides backpacks, pencils, pens, atlases and other educational materials to Muslim/Arabic schools.

In Africa, the U.S. Embassy in Chad recently handed out over 5,000 of the educational kits. In Abeche Ambassador Marc Wall

helped distribute 1,000 backpacks noting the Shared Futures project "aims to improve ties and set down a base for increased friendship through promoting a better understanding of the people of the United States."

Grand Imam of Chad Hassan Hissein Abakar accepted the donation saying, "History will record this event and keep it for coming generations."

In Cote d'Ivoire, the U.S. Embassy carried the fight against HIV/AIDS out into the countryside with a video road show that featured filmed presentations as well as discussions by experts from the ministry of health on AIDS prevention and treatment.

According to the U.S. Embassy in Abidjan, the traveling health exhibition reached thousands of Ivorian "blazing new paths for outreach on the frontlines of HIV/AIDS." Among its highlights was the first ever discussion of AIDs in the Grand Mosque of Yamoussoukro, an event that "ushered in a new openness for the country's Muslim communities on HIV/AIDS."

For more information on U.S. policy, see Africa (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/>).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

Justice Department Consolidates Counterterrorism Effort

Attorney Kenneth Wainstein is President Bush's choice to head a newly reorganized division at the Justice Department to aid in the war against terrorism, the White House announced March 13.

"we must never tire from our efforts" to thwart them.

The following is a Justice Department fact sheet on the new division:

It will help our brave men and women in law enforcement connect the dots before the terrorists strike."

- President George W. Bush, March 9, 2006

The reorganization, which fulfills a recommendation made by the 2005 Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, will bring together all of the department's national security, counterterrorism, counterintelligence and foreign intelligence functions, the president said.

In March 13 comments on the announcement, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said Wainstein also will serve as the department's liaison to the director of National Intelligence.



U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, right, announces the nomination of Kenneth Wainstein, left, a federal prosecutor in Washington, to be the Assistant Attorney Gen. for the National Security Division, at the Dept. of Justice, March, 13, 2006, in Washington. (AP Photo/Lawrence Jackson)

The USA Patriot Act provides valuable tools for law enforcement that help keep America safe from the threat of terrorism. One important provision contained in the recent bill is the creation of a new National Security Division at the Department of Justice (DOJ). The National Security Division will merge the Department's primary national security elements, fulfilling a key recommendation of the March 31, 2005 report of the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD Commission).

The new Division will consolidate the strengths of the Counterterrorism and Counterespionage Sections

Fact Sheet

The federal government has taken a number of steps since the 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States to improve counterterrorism operations, including the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, the National Counterterrorism Center and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Because al-Qaida promises new terrorist attacks, the attorney general told department employees

Department Of Justice To Create National Security Division

"This legislation creates a new position of Assistant Attorney General for National Security. This will allow the Justice Department to bring together its national security, counterterrorism, counterintelligence and foreign intelligence surveillance operations under a single authority. This reorganization fulfills one of the critical recommendations of the WMD Commission:

of the Criminal Division, as well experts from the Office of Intelligence Policy and Review (OIPR) who specialize in the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). This reorganization will allow the Department to fight threats to our national security more effectively and with less bureaucratic red tape.

The consolidation will ensure greater coordination and unity of purpose among the Department's primary organizational units that

(Continued on page 12)

Justice Department Consolidates Counterterrorism Effort . . .

(Continued from page 11)

handle matters of national security. Now, following passage of Patriot Act reauthorization bill, the Justice Department is actively engaged in efforts to stand up the new National Security Division, specifically:

LEADERSHIP

Today, the President announced his nomination of Kenneth Wainstein, U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, to serve as Assistant Attorney General for the National Security Division. Wainstein is uniquely suited to serve in this new capacity. He is a career federal prosecutor, serving first in the United States Attorney's Office in the Southern District of New York between 1989 and 1992, and then in the District of Columbia between 1992 and 2001, where he specialized in the prosecution of federal racketeering cases against violent street gangs, including the gang responsible for the Starbucks triple murder that occurred in Washington in 1997.

From 2001 to 2002, Wainstein served as Director of the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, where he oversaw and supported the operations of the 94 United States Attorneys' Offices. He served as General Counsel and then Chief of Staff at the FBI between 2002 and 2004, where he helped manage the Bureau through a period of extraordinary transformation as it prepared to meet the demands of the 21st century. And most recently, as U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, he has overseen prosecutions ranging from the conviction of Riggs Bank for violating the Bank Secrecy Act, to the indictment of a jihadist in-

involved in roadside attacks against American forces in Iraq, to the successful trial and conviction of the violent Vatos Locos gang that had terrorized parts of Washington.

FUNDING

The creation of the National Security Division reorganizes DOJ resources so that the Department can be as effective as possible in its anti-terrorism efforts. Today, the Attorney General submitted a request to Congress for a \$10 million reprogramming allocation to ensure that the National Security Division is established as quickly and efficiently as possible. The reprogramming funds, to come from the Asset Forfeiture Fund Super Surplus, will provide for the initial executive leadership and administrative functions of the National Security Division.

Last month, the Department requested \$67 million in the President's 2007 budget to fund the new Division's activities into next year. That funding request adds 21 attorneys in OIPR and 12 attorneys in the Counterterrorism and Counterespionage Sections of the National Security Division. These additions will help enable more vigorous oversight of the intelligence community, meet the increased workload of intelligence searches and surveillances, and ensure that cases involving trade in weapons of mass destruction are aggressively pursued.

STRUCTURE

The National Security Division will further improve coordination against terrorism within the Department of Justice and with the

Central Intelligence Agency, the Department of Defense, and other intelligence community agencies. The new Division will consolidate the resources of OIPR and the Criminal Division's Counterterrorism and Counterespionage Sections. These organizational changes will strengthen the Department's efforts to combat terrorism and other threats to national security.

Initially, the majority of affected DOJ employees will remain in their present locations, but additional secure work space is being constructed in the Robert F. Kennedy (Main Justice) Building. The Division will initially encompass approximately 225 employees.

TIMING

Establishing the National Security Division of the Justice Department will be another important step to ensure that those fighting terrorism on a daily basis are doing so in the most efficient way possible. The Attorney General hopes to complete the stand up of the new Division as soon as possible. The Division will become functional soon as Congress approves the reprogramming request and confirms Kenneth Wainstein as the first Assistant Attorney General for National Security.

(end text)

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U. S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

State's Hughes Says Women's Empowerment Critical to U.S. Agenda

By Lauren Monsen
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The United States believes that women's empowerment is essential to strengthening democracy and advancing the development of countries around the globe, says Karen Hughes, U.S. under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs.

Speaking March 8 at a Washington event marking International Women's Day, Hughes said, "President Bush has made empowering women a priority" and has appointed a record number of women, including Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, to senior positions and is working for women's rights globally.

"America is a leader in promoting women's rights because we know that by investing in women, we are investing in a better, more hopeful and more peaceful world," said Hughes. "When you educate women, they share that knowledge with their children, families and communities, so when you invest in women, almost every other statistic in a society improves."

Hughes cited a number of U.S.-supported initiatives that benefit women, including microfinance projects that help alleviate poverty by enabling women to start their own businesses and training for women entrepreneurs.

The United States currently is involved in programs to increase the participation of women in Middle Eastern societies, Hughes said. She pointed to a partnership between the Microsoft Corporation and the International Institute of

Education to train up to 1,000 women in the United Arab Emirates in computer and information technology skills. This program, she said, will be a "model for similar programs in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman and Iraq."



Karen Hughes, U.S. under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs

Women in Africa also are taking on larger roles in their own societies, she said. Hailing African women as peacemakers who strive to settle disputes in their communities, Hughes explained that in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, women have traveled to contested grazing areas, "reaching out to youth with a message of stopping violence and spreading peace."

Liberia, Hughes said, is undergoing a dramatic transformation, after years of civil war that produced abductions, torture and rape, with 250,000 lives lost. During the civil war, "an estimated one in every 10 [Liberian] children was recruited into militias," said Hughes. "Today, children are back

in school, with books instead of guns in their hands. Courageous women have begun the task of nurturing society back to health -- and leading the way is Liberia's first-ever woman president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf."

Hughes said she soon will travel to Santiago with the secretary of state to attend the inauguration of Michelle Bachelet as president of Chile. She praised Bachelet as an inspiring figure who has suffered enormous hardship and is now working to heal divisions in her country. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=March&x=20060301172241tjkcollub0.7299463&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>).)

Similarly, women leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan who have witnessed hate and violence "now have the opportunity to transform their countries into places of freedom and peace," said Hughes.

She applauded the efforts of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which is joining forces with local officials in the developing world to improve the lives of ordinary citizens. USAID personnel are "helping nearly two million women protect their babies from HIV in Africa, rehabilitating more than 60 primary health-care clinics in Iraq and providing basic health services to nearly 4 million women and children in Afghanistan, focusing especially on reducing maternal and child mortality," she said.

Substantial American support is enabling more than 5 million children to attend school in

(Continued on page 21)

Flag Desecration Debate in U.S. "Alive and Well," Scholar Says

By Peter Benda
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – Democratic societies have struggled with the issue of whether the right to free speech should extend so far as to protect those who would mutilate, deface, burn or otherwise “desecrate” state symbols such as national flags or other iconic representations of the national people. In a March 6 webchat, Robert Justin Goldstein, an expert on the flag desecration controversy in the United States, led an online discussion about efforts to proscribe or regulate desecration of state symbols and the implications for freedom of speech and expression.

At the outset of the webchat, Goldstein said his own view is that “flag desecration is a form of expression and, even if such expression may not be popular or wise, it must be protected to preserve our right to freedom of speech from unraveling.”

“Chipping away at our real freedoms poses a far greater danger than does chipping away at physical flags, which are only symbols and not the substance of our freedom,” Goldstein said.

He said that Americans seem to be more sensitive about and protective of, the U.S. flag than is true of citizens of other countries about their national flags. While other countries have had laws protecting their national flags against physical harm, the issue of flag burning or flag desecration “hasn’t attracted nearly the same level of attention or the same number of prosecutions as in the United States,” where hundreds of people

were prosecuted for desecrating the flag until the Supreme Court in *Texas v. Johnson* (1989) struck down flag desecration statutes as unconstitutional infringements on free speech.

Goldstein said there have been “only scattered prosecutions in other countries.”



“Some scholars have suggested that Americans are more focused on the flag because the United States is a ‘new’ and, in a sense, ‘created’ country needing symbols of unity, compared to much longer periods of nationhood in other countries like France and Britain,” he added.

According to Goldstein, much of the original impetus behind the enactment of flag desecration laws in the United States was to prevent the commercial exploitation of the U.S. flag for private gain. This was “one of the primary reasons” why American states began to enact such legislation beginning around 1900, Goldstein said. He added that in at least one case, dating from 1909, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a Nebraska

statute that was used to prosecute a company that sold beer bottles with picture of the flag on its label. Over time, however, “commercial usage of the flag became increasingly accepted as ‘patriotic,’ so by that by the time of the Vietnam War such use was no longer prosecuted, although ‘dissident’ use of the flag was,” he said.

During the Vietnam War years, extending roughly from 1965 to 1974, Goldstein said both the vast majority of flag desecrations and the vast majority of flag desecration prosecutions occurred in the United States. Most of the flag desecration prosecutions - which according to Goldstein numbered an estimated 1000 or more, and involved prosecutions for altering or defacing as well as burning the flag – took place at the state level.

Goldstein said he favors banning all anti-desecration statutes. In general, he said, “public opinion polls have shown a majority of Americans would like to outlaw flag desecration, and even favor a constitutional amendment to do so by overriding the 1989 Supreme Court decision” in *Texas v. Johnson*.

In the aftermath of *Texas v. Johnson*, a succession of proposed constitutional amendments that would allow Congress to prohibit flag desecration have been introduced. The Bush administration is on record supporting the most recent such amendment, introduced in June 2005. Information (http://www.democracy.gov/dd/democracy_dialogues/)

(Continued on page 21)

Technology Promotes Democracy, Lawmakers Say

By Carol Walker
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Technology has the power to bring about a faster pace of democratization in repressive regimes, especially during and between elections and in managing health services, according to members of Congress and technology experts at a conference on March 1.

The conference, "Expanding and Strengthening Democracy: The Role of Technology," was sponsored by Democracy Data and Communications, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and was held at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Technology and innovation have been catalysts for revolutionary change, according to Representative Anna G. Eshoo, a Democrat from California. "What the printing press made possible in centuries past, the Internet has amplified exponentially," Eshoo said.

Repressive regimes control information to protect a strong autocracy and promote a weak civil society, said Tian Chua of the Labour Resource Centre and vice president of the Keadilan Party in Malaysia. Once citizens are able to find ways to learn about government corruption and scandal, they can begin to build a stronger civil society.

"We're using technology to win the battle," Chua said.

Just as fax machines helped disseminate information and mobilize activists in Malaysia in recent decades, Chua now sees the Internet,



SMS (short message system) messaging and cell phones being used to spread, and even broadcast, information and news people cannot get anywhere else. Radio, television and print media in Malaysia are fully censored, Chua said.

More than 103 million people are online in China, and according to a 2005 Internet-use survey, most Chinese use the Internet for entertainment or to obtain information about entertainment and to communicate online with each other.

The average Chinese Internet user stays online for 2.7 hours per day but more than 75 percent never have made an online purchase, according to Guo Liang of

the Research Center for Social Development at the Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing at an Internet meeting at the Brookings Institution in Washington in November 2005. Chinese Internet users prefer instant messaging to e-mail, Gao said, and they rely on the Internet for making contact with colleagues and with people who share their personal and political interests.

The use of blogs to maintain dialogue during and between elections has been key in developing democracies and repressive countries, said Ethan Zuckerman, head of Global Voices Online, a non-profit project of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School, at the technology and democracy conference. Global Voices Online is a worldwide community of bloggers, or bridge bloggers, who find, collect and track information and ideas appearing in blogs, podcasts, photo sharing sites, and videoblogs.

"The period between elections is the most critical stage in democratic transitions as political parties and newly elected officials build the institutions required to sustain democratic gains and maintain public trust in the political process," said Representative Jim Kolbe, a Republican from Arizona, at the March 1 conference.

Kolbe said the use of cell phones and text messages for coordinating demonstrations, telling people how and where to vote during elections, and the use of the Internet have been vital tools in promoting democracy and development.

(Continued on page 16)

Technology Promotes Democracy, Lawmakers Say . . .

(Continued from page 15)

Although SMS was relied on heavily in getting people out to vote in Iraq's December 2005 elections, television is still the most vital way to reach people in Iraq, said Alan Silverleib, director of the Political Parties Program at IRI. Silverleib, along with Rahman Al Jebouri, deputy country director at NDI, participated in the panel discussion from Baghdad, Iraq, via video teleconference.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) helping to get people out to vote in the 2004 Afghanistan elections used SMS technology to let citizens know about polling times and conditions.

"Cellular phones and Internet connectivity are being used by activist citizens in innovative ways to organize and communicate," Kolbe said. "Tools such as cell phone text-messaging and Web logs [blogs] have been utilized as ways to circumvent the traditional mechanisms of state control over media and information."

MANAGING HEALTH CARE

Internet and cell-phone technologies also have become important tools to manage health services, particularly in countries with large rural populations. In Rwanda, where 4 percent of adults living in rural areas and 13 percent in Kigali are living with HIV/AIDS, health-care workers are using cell-phone technology to streamline and expedite data sharing. SMS technology interfaces with the Internet, said panelist Julia Cohen, technical leader for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief Supply Chain Management System.

Health workers and patients in Rwanda can monitor test results and patient progress within seconds rather than days or weeks by logging onto the Internet, if possible, or receive SMS messages. Cohen, who works for the company Voxiva, Inc., which developed the cell-phone service in Rwanda, said the technology also is being used in newly emerging democracies to get around Internet censorship.

At a February congressional hearing on Chinese censorship on the Internet, Representative Christopher Smith, a Republican from New Jersey, criticized Google, Yahoo, Cisco and Microsoft, leading U.S. companies that provide China with the technology necessary to filter Internet content. At the same time, Smith noted the efforts of these and other companies to develop anti-censorship technology that would enable Chinese citizens to access the entire Internet filter-free and detect monitoring by Chinese officials. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/dhr/Archive/2006/Feb/16-161025.html>).)

Internet users have grown worldwide from 16 million to 900 million over the last decade, according to Michael Gallagher, U.S. assistant secretary of commerce for communications and information at the U.N. General Assembly-sanctioned International Summit on the Information Society in Tunis, Tunisia, in November 2005. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2005&m=November&x=20051115172431cmretrop0.9>

31576&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html

"The forces of private sector innovation, freedom of expression, democracy and markets are moving all of the world forward on the digital path," Gallagher.

The Global Internet Freedom Task Force, including State Department officials in international communications policy, human rights, democracy, business advocacy and corporate responsibility, is working with U.S. businesses, NGOs, the European Union and other governments to address Internet freedom issues.

The task force will make recommendations to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on policy and diplomatic initiatives. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=February&x=20060214161400bcrek-law3.503054e-02&t=xarchives/xarchitem.html>).)

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

U.S. Builds New Public-Partnership for Pediatric AIDS Treatment

The U.S. government, through President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), issued a fact sheet March 13 offering a summary of a new public-private partnership to promote scientific and technical discussions on solutions for pediatric HIV treatment, formulations and access.

The U.S. government and its partners will seek to maximize the use of available pediatric formulations and accelerate children's access to a range of treatments.

Also on March 13, first lady Laura Bush spoke about HIV/AIDS and mother-to-child transmission of the disease as she welcomed to the White House visiting guests from Mothers to Mother-to-Be in Cape Town, South Africa, a program of counseling, education and support for HIV/AIDS-infected women in pregnancy.

The text of the fact sheet, also available in PDF format (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/img/assets/16117/031006pediatric_aids.pdf), follows:

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief March 2006

Building a New Public-Private Partnership for Pediatric AIDS Treatment

An estimated 640,000 children worldwide are newly infected with

HIV each year. In 2004, there were an estimated 2.1 million children under age 15 living with HIV infection, with 87 percent living in sub-Saharan Africa. A renewed commitment to effective antiretroviral treatment (ART) of HIV infection in children is essential; without treat-

available to serve children infected with HIV/AIDS. Often, guidelines and other tools to facilitate prescribing ART to children are unavailable to providers.

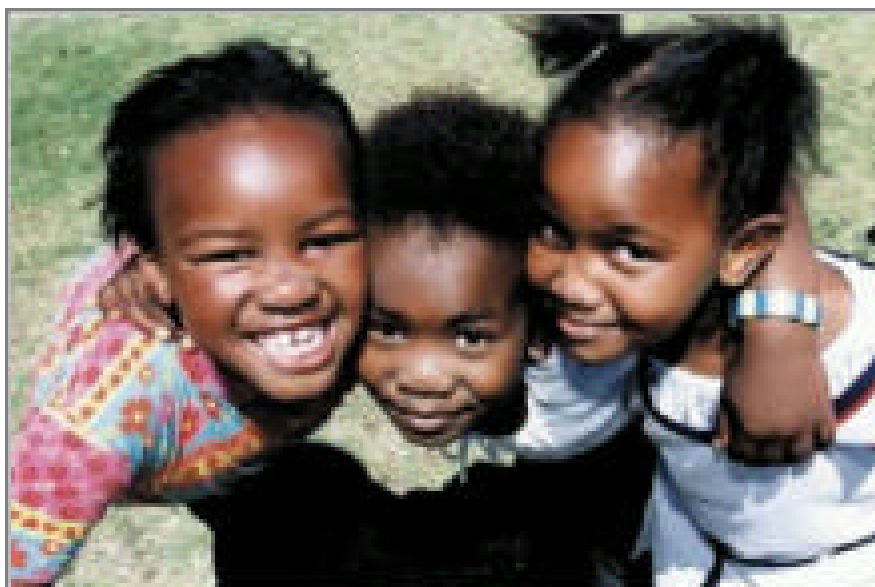
Limited information about pediatric dosing requirements at different ages. Pediatric regimens can be difficult to administer and maintain because of their complexity and other challenges associated with dosing by weight.

Regulatory requirements. While the U.S. Government has taken steps to "fast track" approval for antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), in-country registration processes and limited infrastructure in host nations can present barriers.

Fewer formulations for pediatric ARV. Of the 21 innovator ARVs approved by the Department of Health and Human Services/Food and Drug Administration (HHS/FDA) for the treatment of HIV/AIDS in adults, 12 are approved for use in children, including only seven for children under the age of two years. Four generic ARVs in pediatric formulations have been tentatively approved to date.

THE U.S. LEADS A NEW PARTNERSHIP ON PEDIATRIC HIV/AIDS

The U.S. government, through President Bush's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, is announcing an



ment, the majority of infected children die before they are three years of age.

BARRIERS TO MEETING CHILDREN'S NEEDS

Key obstacles to providing children in resource-limited settings with access to treatment include the following:

Difficulties in diagnosing HIV infection in infants. Traditional diagnostic tests for adults are not effective until a child is 18 months old, and technologies to improve pediatric diagnosis are not yet widely available.

Health care infrastructure and personnel limitations. A limited number of health clinics and trained pediatric health professionals are

(Continued on page 18)

U.S. Builds New Public-Partnership for Pediatric AIDS Treatment . . .

(Continued from page 17)

unprecedented public-private partnership to promote scientific and technical discussions on solutions for pediatric HIV treatment, formulations and access. These partnerships seek to capitalize on the current strengths and resources of:

Innovator pharmaceutical companies in developing, producing and distributing new and improved pediatric ARV preparations.

Generic pharmaceutical companies that manufacture pediatric ARVs or have pediatric drug development programs.

The U.S. government in expediting regulatory review of new pediatric ARV preparations and supporting programs to address structural barriers to delivering ART to children.

Multilateral organizations such as UNAIDS and UNICEF, to provide their expertise to support the success of the partnership.

The U.S. Government and its partners will bring a wide range of expertise, seeking to maximize the utility of currently available pediatric formulations and to accelerate children's access to treatment. This partnership will complement other efforts of the President's Emergency Plan to support programs that expand treatment for adults and children, such as support for health care capacity-building and expedited regulatory review of drugs through HHS/FDA. The partnership will offer children and parents hope for a better day – the hope of families staying together, leading healthy lives, and living positively with HIV/AIDS.

THE PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

Initial steps contemplated by the U.S. Government and the partners include the following:

The partners will work to identify scientific obstacles to treatment for children that the cooperative relationship could address.

The partners will take practical steps to address key barriers. For example, making available tables of standardized dose ranges by weight could simplify dosing management of infected children and enable non-experts to assess whether a child is in the appropriate dose range. In resource-poor settings where equipment, facilities, and trained staff are limited, such tables could be vital.

The partners will share best practices on the scientific issues surrounding dosing of ARVs for pediatric applications.

The partners will develop systems for clinical and technical support to facilitate rapid regulatory review, approval, manufacturing and availability of pediatric ARV formulations.

The first meeting of the partnership will be held on Wednesday, April 19, 2006.

U.S. GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

Innovator Companies: Abbott Laboratories, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Gilead Sciences Inc., GlaxoSmith-Kline, Merck & Co. and Pfizer.

Generic Companies: Aspen Pharmacare, Aurobindo Pharma, Cipla Limited, Emcure Pharmaceuticals, and Ranbaxy Laboratories, which

currently have pediatric ARVs and/or pediatric ARV development programs.

Multilateral Organizations: UNICEF and UNAIDS.

"A few years ago, a little girl in Namibia was born to a mother and father who both had HIV; she had the disease, as well. The name her parents gave her translates as the phrase, 'There is no good in the world.' Months ago, the girl was very sick and losing weight and close to death. But today, she and her entire family are receiving life-saving medicine. Now she's a beautiful, shy, thriving six-year-old, with a new life ahead of her, and there's a little more good in the world." - President George W. Bush, June 30, 2005

"Today, we further our commitment to helping children with a new pediatric AIDS treatment initiative – a groundbreaking and historic alliance. This alliance between public and private partners will promote better, more effective treatments for children living with HIV/AIDS." - Mrs. Laura Bush, March 13, 2006

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

Department of State
U.S. Agency for International Development
Department of Defense
Department of Commerce
Department of Labor
Department of Health and Human Services
Peace Corps

Information about PEPFAR is available at <http://www.pepfar.gov> (<http://www.pepfar.gov/>) ♦

Bird Flu Detected in 11 Nigerian States

By Charlene Porter
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington — One month after the first official confirmation of a dangerous form of highly pathogenic avian influenza in Nigeria, the disease now has been detected in flocks in 11 of the West African nation's 37 states.

About 450,000 birds have been destroyed or died from disease as poultry producers and health officials work together to contain the damage and prevent further spread of the disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported March 9.

Nigerian agriculture officials earlier acknowledged that lax regulatory control of the movement of poultry across borders is one likely way the virus entered Nigeria. That also may explain the appearance of the H5N1 strain of bird flu in late February in Niger, which shares a border with Nigeria's Kano state.

This dangerous form of avian influenza has been confirmed in 33 nations so far, with tests still under way in several other countries where bird deaths are suspect. Since this form of the virus first appeared in Southeast Asia in 2003, an estimated 200 million birds have died or been destroyed in attempts to contain the disease.

Border controls and poultry import bans are among the strategies nations are using to protect their flocks from migrating H5N1. The United States first imposed an embargo on birds and bird products from nations affected by this highly pathogenic form of avian influenza in February 2004. On March 6, the Department of Health and Human Services amended the

embargo to forbid such imports from Nigeria and Egypt. On March 9, the list of nations under embargo was expanded to include India and Niger.

The European Union has imposed import bans on potentially risky

deaths, the latest confirmed March 10 by WHO. The Indonesian government has attributed the death of a 4-year-old boy to H5N1, the latest of 21 deaths in the Southeast Asian nation.

Azerbaijan is investigating disease in 10 people with respiratory illness to determine if H5N1 is the cause. The first disease in animals was detected there in February.

Other mammals are also at risk of exposure to this strain of influenza. German health officials March 9 confirmed the appearance of the disease in the stone marten, a nocturnal mammal that feeds on birds. It is presumed that this creature -- found alive, but severely ill -- was infected by eating an H5N1-infected bird. Three infected cats also have been found in Germany, but the WHO announcement on these discoveries describes infections of nonbird species as rare events.

U.S. government and academic organizations have been conducting an ongoing testing program to look for bird flu viruses in migratory flocks. Flyways crossing Alaska are considered the most likely place for a highly pathogenic influenza strain to enter North America, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, because of the intermingling of native and Asian flocks that occurs there.

H5N1 has not been detected in North America so far, although more common, less dangerous bird flu viruses have been detected. The U.S. agencies will be conducting tests on up to 100,000 migratory birds in 2006 in an expanding federal, state and regional disease surveillance effort. ♦



A man sells chickens on the streets of Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos.
Photo: Reuters

poultry products and adopted tighter bio-security measures. These measures require imposition of protection zones 3 kilometers around the site where infected birds are found, and a broader 10 kilometer surveillance zone in which the movement of poultry and hatching eggs must be controlled strictly. Fairs, markets, shows or any other gathering of poultry are prohibited in these zones.

This form of bird flu has leapt the species barrier and infected humans in 176 cases, resulting in 97

United Nations Predicts Bird Flu in the Americas Within a Year

By Judy Aita
Washington File United Nations
Correspondent

United Nations -- Bird flu is expected to cross the Atlantic Ocean and reach the Americas within a year, a senior U.N. official said March 8.

Dr. David Nabarro, senior U.N. coordinator for avian and human influenza, said that given the flight patterns of wild birds that have been spreading avian influenza (bird flu) from Asia to Europe and Africa, birds infected with the H5N1 virus could reach the Americas within the next six to 12 months.

At a press conference at U.N. headquarters, Nabarro explained that birds migrate each year from West Africa to the Arctic region and Alaska, where they mingle with birds that will migrate six months later south from Alaska into North and South America.

"We are obviously anticipating that there will be H5N1 in birds moving back north up that West Africa/Atlantic flyway in the northern spring, which is shortly," he said. "So we would then anticipate that one-half year later there will be movement south into the Americas of birds that have intermingled."

The migration, he reiterated, will occur within the next six to 12 months, or possibly earlier.

The immediate area of concern is West Africa, where the disease has been found in Niger and Nigeria. But bird die-offs have occurred in other African nations,

and the U.N. expects confirmation of bird flu in other countries soon, Nabarro said.

Further investigation will be needed to determine whether the virus is being spread by migration of wild fowl or through trade.

Representatives of more than 40 sub-Saharan countries will meet in Libreville, Gabon, later in March to discuss responses and how to organize efforts with the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health.

"I just think every country in the world now needs to have its veterinary services on high alert for H5N1," Nabarro said, "to try to make sure they don't get caught unawares and find that it gets into their poultry populations without knowing."

The U.N. coordinator said he believes many countries in the Western Hemisphere are preparing for a possible pandemic. Because H5N1 transmission involves migratory birds, Nabarro said, it is difficult to predict where bird flu will appear next.

"It is like a fire," he added. "We can get it under control if we use the right strategies."

EVENTUAL HUMAN PANDEMIC LIKELY

Quoting WHO officials, Nabarro said there will be a human pandemic sooner or later. It might be due to a mutation of the H5N1 virus to be easily transmissible among people, or it might be due

to another influenza virus. Nations must behave as though it could start any time.

"We have got a virus that is capable of replicating inside humans," he said. "We have got a virus to which humans are not resistant. We have got a virus about which we don't understand everything."

At this stage of the pandemic alert, Nabarro said, "we've got our luxury of being able to get prepared. Once the pandemic does start with human-to-human transmission, the time for preparing ends. All the investment we've done in building relationships, setting up procedures, working out how we're going to operate -- all that investment gets put to the test."

On March 8, China confirmed the death of a 9-year-old girl, the 10th known human death in that country from bird flu.

According to WHO, the human death toll now stands at 96 worldwide. Some 200 million birds have been killed to prevent the virus from spreading.

For additional information on the disease and efforts to combat it, see Bird Flu (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/bird_flu.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

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Flag Desecration Debate in U.S. "Alive and Well," Scholar Says . . .

(Continued from page 14)

freedom_speech/court_cases.html) on the proposed constitutional amendment is available on the Democracy Dialogues Web site.

From a freedom of speech standpoint, Goldstein said, "it is irrelevant whether speech and expression is popular or not. [A]s a Supreme Court justice said in a 1943 decision reversing attempts to expel school children who refused to salute the flag said, basic American freedoms do not depend on popular opinion, but are fundamental protections of a democratic society."

A transcript (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/Mar/09-918401.html>) of the Goldstein Webchat is available on USINFO Webchat station.

This Democracy Dialogues webchat, the last of a four-part series of webchats on different aspects of freedom of speech, is part of a larger global discussion about specific topics in democratic governance. This ongoing project, currently focusing on women's rights, features webchats, speakers, videos, photos and an open on-line discussion board as resources to promote dialogue and exchange on democracy between Americans and foreign audiences. Additional information is available on the Democracy Dialogues (http://www.democracy.gov/dd/democracy_dialogues.html) Web site.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>) ♦

State's Hughes Says Women's Empowerment Critical to U.S. Agenda . . .

(Continued from page 13)

Afghanistan, Hughes added. "More than a third of these are girls," she pointed out. And in Africa, "one of the primary goals of the President's Education Initiative is to enroll more girls in school," she said. At the same time, U.S. funds help support a new community center in Angola that teaches basic literacy skills, "and the women learn more than literacy: they learn about human rights and political participation," said Hughes.

Hughes placed particular emphasis on the importance of women's growing involvement in the political process. "In Kuwait, a brave woman named Roula al-Dashti spoke out to the men leading her country with a compelling mes-

sage: 'half a democracy is not a democracy,'" Hughes said. "She challenged the status quo, recruited student leaders from Kuwait University to join her cause and helped women gain the right to vote and run for office in Kuwait."

Hughes also quoted Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen of India, best known for his work on welfare economics. Sen "argued that nothing is more important for development today than the economic, political and social participation of women," Hughes said. "I agree, and I'm proud that America is standing at the side of women throughout the world, ready to support and partner with them as they make their own choices, raise their own voices and

find their own way to a brighter, more hopeful future for themselves and their families."

For information on U.S. observances of International Women's Day and Women's History Month, see Women in the United States (http://usinfo.state.gov/scv/history_geography_and_population/population_and_diversity/women_in_the_us.html).

The full text (<http://www.state.gov/r/us/62788.htm>) of Hughes' remarks is available on the State Department Web site.

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